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SUBJECT: CONFERENCE ON BELARUS: EU ON DEFENSIVE, RUSSIANS  
STAY AWAY

REF: 05 BRATISLAVA 924

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: An April 25-26 conference on Belarus held at the Slovak Ministry on Foreign Affairs was an intellectual lynch mob in two acts. The first day, academics and activists painted a bleak picture of the Lukashenko regime, criticized Russian "meddling," and presented statistical data that showed Lukashenko won the election by a much smaller margin than announced. Russian MFA representative Alexej Andrejevic Sazonov, who had traveled to Bratislava ostensibly for the Conference, failed to show up for the panel on Belarus' relationship with its neighbors. Despite an open invitation to any audience member who would like to represent Russia's views, no one was forthcoming. The second day focused on EU policy and instruments, with calls for the creation of an EU Special Representative for Belarus and a broader visa ban. Throughout the conference, Belarusian activists repeated their message: the international community must focus on "saving the lives" of detained political prisoners, while keeping in mind that the people of Belarus cannot wait five more years for change.  
END SUMMARY.

MANAEV'S NUMBERS: LUKA WON, BUT NOT AS BIG  
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¶2. (SBU) A conference on "The European Union and Belarus After the Presidential Elections: The Need For a New Strategic Approach" was held April 25-26 at the Slovak MFA, and co-sponsored by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the German Marshall Fund, and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Kukan called for a focus on strengthening civil society in Belarus, while declaring support for ODIHR's declaration that Belarus' March elections were not free, fair, or transparent. Kukan said that Slovakia welcomed the April 10 GAERC conclusions on Belarus as the beginning of improved EU measures, and voiced his support for the visa ban. However, Kukan said Slovakia advocates a "bigger list" that is left open for new additions.

¶3. (SBU) Oleg Manaev, the Director for the Institute for Independent Socio-Economic and Political Studies in Belarus, presented what he claimed were more accurate election result statistics developed from polling conducted in the days following the election. According to Manaev, Lukashenko received 63 percent of the vote (vice 83 percent), and Milinkevich 21 percent (vice 6.1 percent). Kozulin received 4.9 percent (vice the 2.2 announced by the Central Election Committee). Manaev said that while two thirds of Belarusians said they watched the televised statements by the candidates, only 10 percent said it affected the way they voted.

SANNIKOV: NEED TO FOCUS ON THE PRISONERS  
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¶4. (SBU) Charter 97 founder Andrei Sannikov's told the

audience that there was an "uprising, but not a revolution." Sannikov suggested that the focus of the international community should be directed at the near-term goal of "saving the lives" of political prisoners held by the Lukashenko regime after the protests on October square. According to Sannikov, the activist community in Belarus is united in its insistence that Belarus cannot wait another five years for political change.

15. (SBU) Slovak MFA Political Director Miroslav Lajcak told the Conference that Slovakia was proud of its role prompting EU action, specifically the development of the visa ban list and discussions of "smart sanctions." Lajcak also told the panelists that Slovakia was against elevating Schengen visa fees, as it was important that Europe be accessible to Belarusian citizens. Lajcak -- who visited Minsk in advance of the March elections -- also painted a picture of GOB interlocutors as "apologetic and reserved." In his interactions with the GOB in March, he said many bureaucrats were ready to admit that Belarus had problems, but at the same time seemed unwilling to change. As far as Slovak foreign policy is concerned, Lajcak said Belarus is "at the top of the list."

#### RUSSIA REMAINS THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

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16. (SBU) Neither the Belarusian nor Russian Ambassadors to Slovakia attended the conference, and Russian MFA representative Alexej Andrejevic Sazonov, who had traveled to Bratislava ostensibly for the conference, failed to show up. Highlighting the fact that the relationship between the two countries is deeper than a simple geopolitical equation, Manaev said that given the choice between being "European" or "Russian," 32 percent of Belarusians choose "European" while

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56 percent choose "Russian." Former Polish Ambassador to Belarus Mariusz Maszkiewicz, who was detained after participating in the October square demonstrations, said that there were several Russians at the square alongside Belarusian activists who considered it their "duty" to help Belarus with democracy.

#### WHY NO RUSSIAN OR BELARUSIAN PARTICIPATION

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17. (SBU) On April 27, MFA Director for CIS and Balkans Stefan Rozkopal told EUR DAS Rosemary DiCarlo that MFA State Secretary (Deputy Minister) Magda Vasaryova had sent a letter

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in advance of the conference to the Russian Ambassador requesting a speaker from Russia as well as the Ambassador's attendance at the conference. Meanwhile, all other Chiefs of Mission -- including the U.S. and Belarusian Ambassadors -- were invited via e-mail. However, because of the close relationship between the Belarusian and Russian Ambassadors in Bratislava, the Belarusian Ambassador decided that, since he did not receive a letter like his Russian colleague, he had not been "officially" invited and was noticeably absent from the forum. While the Russians later conveniently double-booked the speaker they had brought in for the conference (precluding his participation), the Belarusians did not get off so lightly; the MFA is calling in the Belarusian Ambassador on May 2 so Rozkopal can inform him officially of the conference and fill him in on what he missed.

#### DAY 2: EU BASHING

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18. (SBU) The second day of the conference was dedicated to "Revising the EU's Instruments" and "Rethinking the EU's Policy." German MP Markus Meckel was the first speaker to call for the creation of an EU Special Representative for

Belarus, and he knocked the EU's funding mechanism for being able to dole out "10 million dollars in 2 weeks, while getting 10,000 dollars for a project is almost impossible." Meckel proposed expanding the EU visa ban to every university rector that expels a student at Lukashenko's orders, and every judge who sentences someone to prison for participating in peaceful protests; "people must realize that they have to change their own behavior, or at least take responsibility for their actions" he said.

¶9. (SBU) Slovak NGO activist Balazs Jarabik said that EU reaction times are appalling, and that any revision of EU instruments must address the problems synchronizing policy, communications, and democratic assistance among the 25. While the EU effectively uses its 11 Heads of Mission in Minsk to challenge the status quo, Jarabik called for more "high level" interactions by Solana and an EU Special Representative for Belarus; other conference attendees proposed asking EU aspirants such as Croatia and Turkey to amplify the EU message by implementing the visa bans themselves, since many Belarusians go to Croatia and Turkey for holidays.

#### GERMAN POLICY PLANNER: EU NEEDS A NEW PHILOSOPHY

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¶10. (SBU) Martin Kremer, Counselor for EU-related Affairs at the German Foreign Office's Policy Planning directorate, told the conference that the EU needs a "new philosophy" that encompasses Belarus and Russia. He called on the EU to develop a more "proactive" policy rather than a reactive one, and for an increase in person-to-person and student exchanges. Kremer was also one of the strongest voices calling for the creation of an EU "Action Plan" on Belarus, which would communicate the benefits of cooperation with the Union to the Belarusian people. He said that the German and Finnish EU Presidencies will likely support such activities.

#### FERRERO-WALDNER REP DEFENDS EU AD NAUSEUM

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¶11. (SBU) Judith Gebetsrothner, a member of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's cabinet, said that while there is "room for improvement" the EU's actions -- including its funding for 30 minutes of broadcasting a week -- should not be overlooked. Still, she admitted that the EU is a "compromise" institution which does "what our flexibility allows." While she delivered a labored defense of EU response times and policies, several attendees left the room for cigarettes and coffee, and one analyst pantomimed suicide by hanging himself by his tie before she delivered her final thought: that the EU "cannot substantially increase engagement or assistance to Belarus, but will try to increase student and academic exchanges."

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¶12. (SBU) Similarly, Pirkka Tapiola, adviser to the policy unit of the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, defended a small visa ban list by saying that "in politics, you need responsibility" and that it was better to hold those few people clearly responsible for Belarus' political situation responsible while sparing the rest. Tapiola also warned conference members not to expect the EU to change its posture towards Belarus in the near term, as the EU (by which he likely meant Javier Solana) believes its "two track" approach is the right one.

#### MANAEV: EURONEWS AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE

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¶13. (SBU) Pursuing media coverage on Euronews, a television news program broadcast in several European languages including Russian, was touted as a free alternative to the EU's multi-million dollar broadcast schemes to date. Manaev said that his polling data showed that 2.4 percent of

Belarusians listen to the EU-sponsored Deutschewelle broadcast, 5.7 percent listen to EU-funded European radio, and 3.7 percent watch the European news. On the other hand, Manaev said, Euronews is watched by nearly one million Belarusians, and when Euronews covered the visit of Milinkevich to western Europe earlier this month, those viewers were watching. Manaev said that using "free" media already established in Belarus should be an EU priority.

REVOKING ILO PRIVILEGES: A "NON-SANCTION" OPTION?

14. (SBU) The panelists discussed the possibility of getting the International Labor Organization (ILO) to cancel Belarus' trade preferences and privileges, which they say equal EUR 200 million a year. The cancellation of these privileges are not "sanctions" per se, but could definitely be used as a practical tool to punish the Lukashenko regime.  
VALLEE